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Lord Minto's Speech

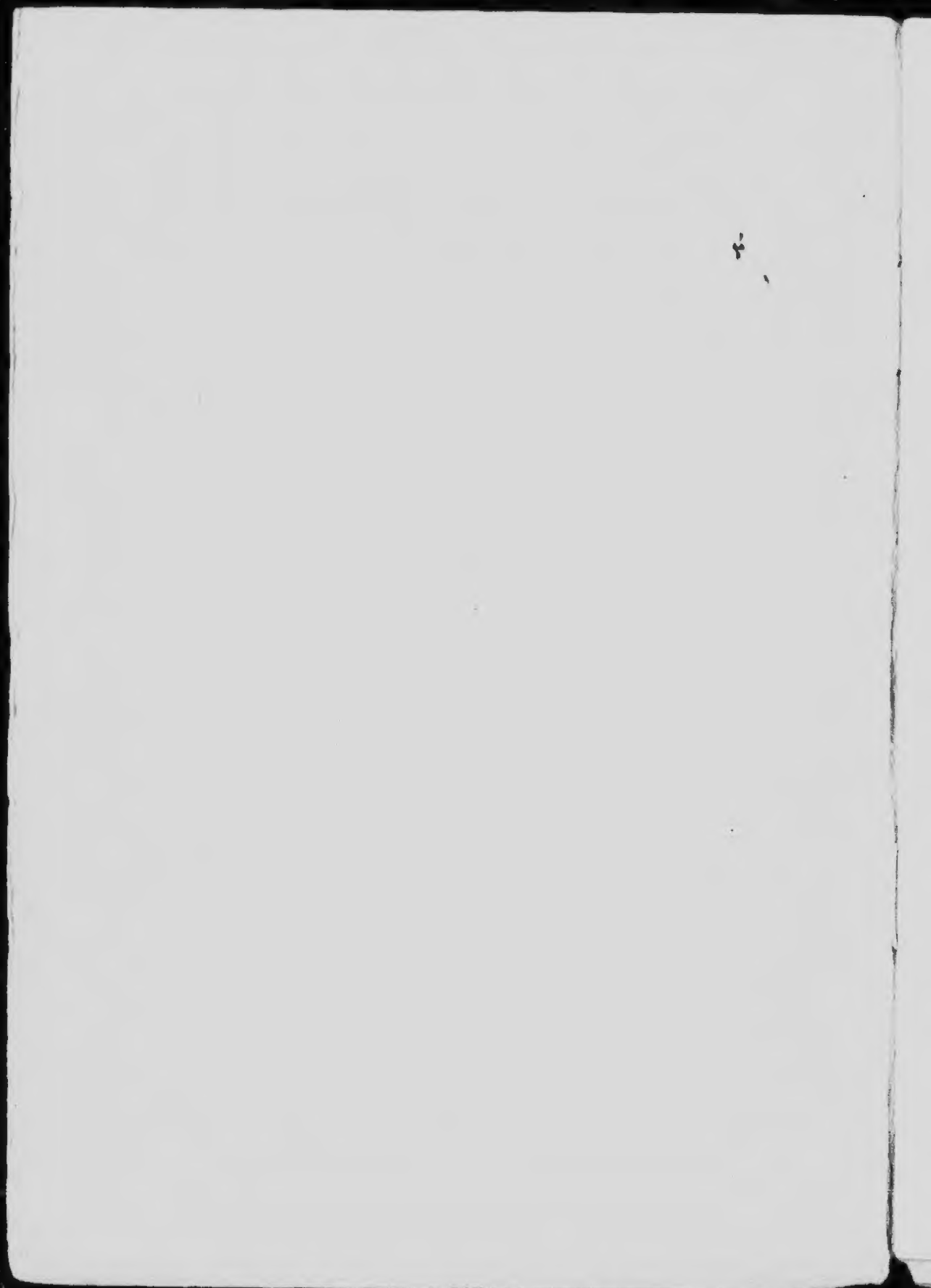
A Graphic Sketch of the Development of Canada.



Reprinted from the Daily Telegraph of Sept. 2, 1903.

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HE heartiness with which you have received the toast of my health, I assure you I most deeply appreciate. I feel proud, indeed, at being present at this great gathering to-night as the Governor-General of Canada, the representative of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII. I feel, too, that the occasion is no ordinary one, the assembly of the first congress of the chambers of commerce of the Empire held outside of the United Kingdom. I hope, gentlemen, that I may be allowed on behalf of this great Dominion, to welcome you to Montreal, its business centre, a city full of the history of medieval commerce — the key two hundred and fifty years ago, as it is now, to the upper waters of the St. Lawrence and the Ottawa — the advanced post of the kings of France for the propagation of Christianity and the fur trade ; now the commercial capital of Canada, eager to welcome and to honour the commercial representatives of a world-wide empire. You have come to us, gentlemen, in prosperous times : Canada is *booming*.

A land of promise.

Perhaps to many of you, or at any rate to some of you, this may be your first visit to British North America, and even though you may have followed the story of this land of promise, I doubt if it can have been possible to completely realize from across the seas the steadily growing strength of the Dominion since confederation, or the leaps and bounds of the prosperity of the last few years. But it has been my lot to have seen somewhat more of Canada than my predecessors : as an eye-witness, I can tell you something of her marvellous growth. It is almost exactly twenty years ago since I set foot at Quebec on Lord Lansdowne's staff, in advance of many revolutionizing influences, before the days of bicycles, electric cars, or automobiles ; when in the brilliant sunshine of the winter months the streets were gayer than now with picturesque sleighs, when blanket coats and moccasins still held their own even in the capital, when the old Red River cart was still to be seen in the West, and a solitary buffalo might still be heard of on the plains. I had crossed the Rocky Mountains before the completion of the railway, and before the destruction of those magnificent forests ; I had camped along the "foothills", and ridden many hundred miles over the prairies ; I had seen the last of the painted warriors on the war-path, I had heard with my comrades of '85 the last Indian warwhoop, before I came back again to Canada as Governor-General, to renew many old friendships and happy recollections. But even after my few years of absence, I came back to a new world. A great

railway had united the east to the west ; I found myself riding through the Rocky Mountains on a cowcatcher, or being prosaically conveyed along the foothills in a private car, till in sheer desperation I called for a horse, and insisted on following my old friend the trail, even though it might parallel a government track ! Canada was changed : civilization had made great strides, much of the charm and romance of a wild life were gone ; but still the prairies were the same as I remembered them, and the disused trails were still there, and, notwithstanding the great railway and all the advantages it gave, the development of the North West seemed to have hung fire for a time ; it scarcely filled up as rapidly as those who knew it expected that it would. Certainly there was the opening up of the mining district of the Kootenay, and later still the rush to the Yukon ; but the wheat growing area of the North West, though steadily growing in importance, seemed scarcely to have secured the recognition it deserved, till three years ago, or may I say at the outside four summers ago, the scales seemed suddenly to have fallen from men's eyes ; the exuberant harvests of Manitoba and the territories had won their reputation ; the great " trek " from the Dakotas and the western states began ; the emigration offices of the motherland were filled to overflowing ; transportation and organization almost failed to meet the flood of immigration here, and it became more and more evident that under present conditions they would be quite incapable of handling the outgoing production of this new land.

*The greatest future granary
of the world.*

Gentlemen, this great development means something more than the mere recognition of Canada as the possessor of the greatest future granary of the world: it is the introduction of a new factor into the history of the Dominion; it means the increasing political representation of the great agricultural interests of the west; it means a magnitude of agricultural production which is already influencing the economic considerations of the Empire. In that sense, I feel sure it has not escaped the attention of the congress. But the advance is not only in the Northwest; agricultural wealth, mineral wealth, unlimited water power, the wealth of the forests, the wealth of the rivers and inland seas are all surging to the front, pointing to a glorious future, but a future which must bring with it new and great responsibilities for the Dominion, and possibilities of momentous importance not only to the Dominion but to the motherland from which she sprang.

A critical period.

Your congress, Lord Brassey, has assembled at a critical period in the history of the Empire; no more suitable moment could have been selected, and in my opinion no more fitting place of meeting, than the great trading city of Montreal. We are on the eve possibly of a great upheaval not only of the fiscal conditions of the United Kingdom; but of the present system of inter-Imperial tariffs. We are

committed to a struggle over opinions accepted long ago and now invested with a sanctity with which, we may be told, it is almost sacrilegious to interfere. So far, we are only at the commencement of the fight, we have had nothing but affairs of outposts ; the great moves of the campaign have not yet begun, and I cannot tell you, gentlemen, how much I think the discussions held at your congress can do to clear the air, and to place before the public the practical views and the conclusions of those who have followed a commercial career. All the more do I hope that the Canadian social surroundings with which the delegates from across the seas have been brought into contact, and the published opinions of the Canadian representatives, may assist to make clearer to the people of the United Kingdom the feeling and aspirations of the people of Canada.

Charity begins at home.

Mr. Chairman, the verdict as to the adoption of the principles of free trade or protection, and the acceptance of the many consequences dependent upon either definition, must, in my humble opinion, rest largely on the findings of experts, submitted to the consideration of the populations concerned. Even then, even with the best expert reports before us, we must expect a growth of public opinion rather than any immediate decision ; we must remember too, in any hopes that we may form for the Imperial benefits to be derived from a great change of policy, that after all charity begins at home, and that no people will consent to risk, as it will be argued to

them they will risk, the home comforts of their kith and kin, unless they feel very sure of the step they are asked to take. No one hopes more sincerely than I do that that step may be made feasible and safe.

Now, gentlemen, in looking forward to this great coming discussion, there is one point which must appeal preëminently to a gathering such as this : the future relations between the motherland and her dependencies, the possibility and, in an Imperial sense, the necessity — I say it most strongly — for closer commercial relations in respect to an interchange of trade, on preferential conditions, between the old country and her possessions beyond the seas ; a problem surrounded by difficulties, domestic, Imperial and foreign, but on the solution of which, I firmly believe, the future of our Empire depends.

The link of common interests.

We need something more than a sentimental connection with the motherland, we want the link of common interests clearly defined ; we want that link to be strong enough to enable us simultaneously to withstand outside opposition. But, gentlemen, I am no disbeliever in sentiment. I believe that the sentimental affection for the motherland lies deep in the heart of every man of British descent ; I believe as an Imperial asset we cannot overestimate the value of it. Yet one is told that one cannot do business on sentiment. I agree to that in the sense that no man with a head on his shoulders would make a sentimental bargain ; but what leads up to

the bargain? What initiates the wish to make the bargain? Does anyone mean to say that all this discussion on tariffs and inter-Imperial trade would ever have arisen without the wish to keep up old home connections! British sentiment is at the bottom of it all. Perhaps to the foreign world the value and the strength of that sentiment is more evident than it is to ourselves. I hope we shall never underrate it, though we admit that it cannot invalidate our capacity to deal with hard facts on business lines.

I am afraid, gentlemen, that at home there is not that widespread knowledge one would wish for, either of the geography and resources of the Dominion, or of the feelings and conditions of its people. Sometimes little value is attached to the sentiment I have alluded to, at others it is exaggerated into a blind manifestation of loyalty. Some people would appear scarcely to realize that the days of the old plantations are gone by.

The days of Colonies are gone by.

My opinion is that the days of colonies are gone by too: we have reached the days of young nations. I believe the strongest feeling in the Dominion is that of Canadian nationality. If I were a Canadian I should object to be called a colonist: I would be called a Canadian, but I would be an Imperial Canadian, and a very Imperial one, too. The people at home unacquainted with a frontier life, can hardly be expected to realize the hardships and struggles of the pioneers who created a new country, or the pride of the descendants who have inherited it from them,

who now claim it is their gift to the empire, and who, I believe, with all their rising feeling of nationality, with all the independence of thought and action it brings with it, affectionately cherish the idea of an Imperial unity and of a continued share in the glorious history of the British race.

I have already said we have a great problem before us, the solution of which must depend largely on the researches of experts, and on such well thought out opinions as the delegates of such a congress as is assembled here, can give to the public. I hope possibly that their discussions may not only have tended to suggest a commercial basis upon which the unity of the Empire may rest, but may have impressed upon the public the necessity for some common defence to ensure its safety from attack.

I have only attempted to outline some of the main features affecting the present position as they appear to me. I have purposely avoided statistics and details and I have endeavored to speak broadly as to some of the conditions surrounding a great controversy ; but there is yet an all-important aspect of the present position to which I cannot but draw your attention.

The wish for a closer union.

No one who has watched the history of the United Kingdom and its possessions for the last few years, can have failed to note the growth of a great Imperial idea, the wish for a closer union between the old country and her dependencies for sentimental reasons, for the sake of trade and prosperity, and for

the sake of common defence, and certain striking events have accentuated this idea. The war in South Africa, with its rush to arms throughout British possessions all over the world to the assistance of the motherland, was surely a direct enough answer to those who doubt the value of sentiment; Canada's further offer of preference to British imports, the recorded opinion of the Colonial Premiers at the imperial conference last year, and lastly, but greatest of all, Mr. Chamberlain's visit to South Africa and the conclusions that visit has prompted him to offer to the British public.

For the first time, a great minister of the Crown found it possible to separate himself temporarily from the trammels of political routine, and to look for himself into the conditions of a distant dependency, not only to consult its statesmen, but to rub shoulders with men of different races, with the speculator, the soldier and the leader of irregulars, and all those strange but spirited human elements which from time immemorial have formed the advance guard of civilization; and returned to tell his countrymen that on the distant veldt the all-absorbing questions of insular statesmanship had seemed to him to dwindle in importance, and that the welfare and interests of the people at home were inseparably connected with those of their kinsmen beyond the seas. After Mr. Chamberlain's long and distinguished political career, his practical knowledge of business and of all the needs of the working classes, I ask you, is it probable, that he would be led to jeopardize his life's work by a mere Imperial dream?

What is to be our choice ?

Gentlemen, it is impossible to foretell the issue of the coming struggle ; but in my firm belief, we stand very near the parting of the ways : our opportunity is before us, it may never come again. What is to be our choice ? a mighty empire, a brilliant constellation of nations, united in common interests, disseminating throughout the world the spirit of free institutions and liberal ideas, proud of a glorious history and confident in the promises of its future, or the gradual estrangement of that empire's component parts and its ultimate disintegration. This is not the time to sit down and fold one's hands ; it is the time for those who believe in the future of our empire to speak out.

